

London Borough of Havering Fostering Service

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

The London Borough Of Havering Fostering Service is part of the Family Placement Service, which is managed within the Children's Services Section of the Children's Service. Short and long term fostering, shared care (Family Link) and kinship fostering are provided. Staff recruit, assess, train, review and support foster carers. The service is divided into two teams; the Family Link Scheme, which provides respite breaks for children with disabilities and the Fostering Team, which acts as Havering's main fostering service provider. Where the needs of young people cannot be met within the in-house service, a separate Commissioning Unit purchases placements from independent foster care providers.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This was a lighter touch inspection as the service had received a 'good' outcome at the last inspection. All key standards were looked at. The service continues to provide good support to carers and is well-managed. Education is valued and children are supported to pursue their individual hobbies and interests. The service from children's social workers has not been consistent in the past, with some fostered children experiencing change of social worker, infrequent visits and review decisions not being carried out. However, the service has developed closer links with the children's team to try to address this.

Improvements since the last inspection

All three requirements made at the last inspection have been met, leading to improvements in the timing of reviews and assessments, plus obtaining Criminal Record Bureau checks on kinship carers.

Carers now save for young people so they can build up a fund for when they leave foster care.

A dedicated doctor and Looked After Nurse have been appointed to concentrate on the health needs of looked after children.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The service considers the health needs of children when matching them to carers. Specialist training is provided to help shared carers meet the specialised health needs of children they look after. Foster carers promote children's health by ensuring they are registered with a general practitioner and have access to dental and optical services.

Carers encourage children to take an interest in their health and promote healthy ways of living, for example, by trying to eat a healthy diet and taking part in activities that give them exercise.

The agency ensures that most children/young people (92.9%) have annual health checks and is considering creative ways to encourage all young people to have their checks.

There have been delays, some considerable, in children being able to access child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), although this is reported as improving recently. Plans are in place for a dedicated clinical service for looked after children to meet the demand for planned and emergency services.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Havering has systems in place to keep children safe. Training for staff and carers ensures they have information on how to safeguard the needs of all children, including those with disabilities. There is a clear complaints procedure, which is accessible to children. Anti-bullying is given a high profile and children have access to information on help lines should they need them. Carers are pro-active in making sure bullying is dealt with effectively by schools and in giving support when children do experience bullying.

The time taken to assess potential carers has improved, with most assessments completed within six months. There are insufficient fostering households to meet the demand for places, with 79 fostering placements purchased from independent fostering agencies. There is currently a hold on the recruitment of staff and the agency's own staff carry out all assessments; the service reports that independent assessors would be used, if necessary, to assess family or friends as carers.

The service plans to target recruitment of carers on those able to meet the needs of specific groups of children who are currently difficult to match to suitable carers. These include adolescents, children with challenging behaviour, children within large sibling groups, black and ethnic minority children and those children with disabilities wishing to use the shared care service.

Clear recording shows that the recruitment process is thorough in ensuring staff are suitable to work with children and are appropriately qualified. However, telephone checks of references are not made and on one file there was only one written reference.

The Carers' Panel represents a range of experience and expertise and includes an elected member of the local authority. The panel mostly achieves its quality assurance function through careful consideration of all information presented to it for reviews and approvals of carers.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Carers are very positive in their approach to education and its value for children. Children are encouraged to take part in school clubs, musical activities and trips to help them get the most from their time in school. Carers establish good links with children's schools and work in partnership with them to support children's behaviour and learning.

Educational activities are encouraged outside of school, for example, with carers helping children to learn to read and develop a love of books. Children returning to live in the borough are encouraged to choose a new school; priority is given to looked after children regarding their admission to the borough's schools. Arrangements are made for some children excluded from school to have some kind of educational input.

There are insufficient carers to care for children with disabilities and to provide their families with a short term break. Although arrangements have been made to use alternative providers to offer some type of respite, families can still wait for some time before receiving a service. The service carefully matches children and their families to carers and, as a result, there can be vacancies.

The service ensures that carers receive training, in equality and diversity, to help them provide care which respects to children's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Children are encouraged to pursue their individual hobbies and interests and so develop their confidence and self-esteem. Financial help is available to carers to support this, as well as arrangements for special access to library services and reduced rates for leisure activities within the borough.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Havering ensures children and young people can give their views on the service. This year, a consultation day was held at an outdoor pursuits centre to combine activities, with opportunities for young people to contribute to a plan for future improved services. Groups for specific ages, such as kids to teens and the adolescents' group,

are also consulted. It is positive that birth children's views are sought at reviews and taken into consideration.

Contact arrangements are carried out by carers so that children and young people can maintain relationships with family and friends. The impact of contact on children is noted by carers and fed back to their social workers, but in one case it appears that the views of children had not been considered by the child's social worker.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The service gives clear guidance to carers on the allowances due to them and how these should be apportioned, for example, for pocket money and clothing for children. Financial help is available so that young people can pursue leisure interests and hobbies. Funding is available to help young people take part in school trips and holidays so they do not miss out on any of the usual school experiences. Carers receive allowances promptly and are refunded for receipted items purchased to meet children's needs in their homes.

A system has been introduced where all carers are expected to save on behalf of the children they look after, so they can accumulate funds for their futures. There are guidelines on the increasing amount carers are expected to save. However, some carers save considerably more than is expected as they wish to improve the economic wellbeing of young people.

Parents of children using the shared care service are expected to contribute towards the trips and activities that carers do with their children.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Havering Fostering Service is staffed by qualified social workers who are supported through regular supervision and annual appraisals. There is a clear management structure and managers are professionally qualified, most also having management qualifications.

The Statement of Purpose, for both the fostering service and family link service, sets out clearly what the service provides. It is presented in a suitable format for children and young people to understand. A few details are out of date but the service reviews these documents annually and plans to amend them at this time.

The service uses an audit tool to identify any gaps in record keeping and trigger processes, such as renewing CRB checks or annual reviews. Not all children's files showed a clear chronology and this was highlighted by the audit. The service keeps appropriate registers and stores information securely to ensure it remains confidential.

Havering has a clear and effective strategy for working with and supporting carers. This includes offering out-of-hours support, regular supervision and respite care.

The service ensures its staff and carers extend their skills and knowledge through a training programme. Carers find the training relevant and useful to help them meet the needs of children they care for. Although the service puts on training at different times, not all carers, particularly those who work full-time, take up training opportunities as they do not find the times suitable.

Kinship carers are able to access training, but support and training for kinship carers has not developed as expected due to resistance from some carers.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Std.	Action	Due date
15	ensure two written references are obtained for staff (Regulation 20)	31/01/2008

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that telephone enquiries are made as well as obtaining written references for staff(NMS 15)
- review the accessibility of training to include all carers (NMS 16)